

MUS 7220 7001

Dr. Colprit

Reading: *The Developmental Origins of Musicality*

Author: Sandra Trehub

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SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS AND SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONS

In *The Developmental Origins of Musicality* Sandra Trehub shows that human beings have a relationship with music that is inherent rather than developed, as evidenced by studies involving infants and their reaction to music. These studies demonstrate that infants react to music in ways that are similar to those of adults who have not had musical training. This parallel between the responses of the two groups to musical stimulus allows Trehub to infer that the human relationship to music is unique for the emotional and social role that it plays in our species.

One of the most important points that Trehub makes in her review is that infants are more sensitive to changes made to melodies conforming to major or minor keys than to non-traditional melodies. This was confirmed by the fact that, while infants are able to perceive the slightest changes in relative pitch for diatonic melodies, they only perceive changes made to non-diatonic melodies if these changes strongly alter the melody itself. This difference in sensibility seems to be inherent rather than cultural, as other research mentioned in the article shows that humans are not sensitive to cultural musical structures until the age of five.

Another point that Trehub's review highlights is an infant's natural aversion for dissonance. For instance, when consonant notes in folk songs were substituted for dissonant ones, the change was perceived by the younglings, who immediately displayed discontentment towards the changes.

A third important aspect regarding the origin of music in the human development is the unique form in which human beings relate to music as opposed to other species. Trehub shows that, like humans, some primates are capable of identifying variances in melodies, albeit to a limited extent. However, the relationship that humans establish with music is not simply one of being able to identify intervals and melodies. Trehub shows that our species connect with music at an emotional as well as social level. By way of an example of the emotional aspect, she tells of the fact that infants display far more interest in a mother's singing than in her speaking. The social relation to music can be seen in the sense of comradery achieved by partaking in group musical events such as attending a concert or chanting at a sporting event.

Both the infants' natural ability to distinguish changes in diatonic melodies more precisely than in non-traditional ones and their preference for consonance over dissonance raise questions that were only partially addressed in the article. Firstly, were the experiments mentioned performed using Eastern music as well as Western music? The article alludes to an infant's ability to detect pitch changes that are smaller than a semitone and to perceive the music of any culture but does not address whether the reaction to the dissonances from uneven tuning would be of pleasure or aversion. Two other questions that arise from the reading have to do with what seems to be a contradiction within the article. How does the type of music that the mother of a prenatal infant is exposed to influence the child's postnatal preference for consonance or dissonance? Does the mother's own preference (such a preference for New Music over more

traditional styles) influence the preferences of the infant? The reason for these questions is that Trehub says that basic abilities in listening to music are inherent, natural traits of the human being. However, she also mentions that prenatal musical exposure could be the cause for the similarities between infant's and adult's perceptions of musical characteristics or lack thereof within melodies. If this is the case, would the mother's preference for and exposure to New Music throughout the development of the fetus affect the child's reactions to consonant and dissonant intervals?

My final question is twofold and is related to the emotional and social effect of music upon the human being. Trehub states that because music has no referential meaning, it engages the imagination of the listener with a freedom which is not possible in verbal language. How is this engagement similar or different when listening to traditional music versus New Music? What parts of the brain are activated when one is exposed to each of these types of music?